

Discord anew over proposed vineyard

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BONNY DOON — Vintner Jim Beauregard knows it's not true that when you've seen one tree you've seen them all.

His proposed vineyard, which has been held up during various three-year battles with environmentalists, is now due to be planted, but a conflict over a tree may hold things up at the 11th hour.

At issue is a Santa Cruz cypress tree. The Sierra Club says the tree is the world's largest specimen of an endangered species; Beauregard isn't convinced. Neither is a botanist who came to the site and said the tree actually might consist of multiple trunks, rather than being a single tree.

The battle ground is a 525-acre site on Martin Road and Ice Cream Grade. Following a three-year battle with environmentalists, Beauregard plans to start clearing land to plant the vineyard within 60 days.

But environmentalists might try to stop him.

In an 11th-hour move, a resident of the area got in touch with the American Forestry Association in Washington, which in 1977 had identified the tree as the largest specimen of its kind — known as a "champion," in forester's nomenclature.

Kay Hartman, a representative of the association, sent a letter to the county and the Coastal Commission containing the description and location of the tree. And Dave Bockman, local

Sierra Club spokesman, has asked the Board of Supervisors to step and save the tree. "It may mean a revision of the permits issued to Beauregard Vineyards," he says.

To complicate matters, the botanist who was in charge of doing the original biotic survey of the property in 1980, Bill Davilla, said Tuesday after revisiting the site that he had some questions about the validity of the "champion" claim. Although he said the tree does appear to be the largest in the area, he was curious about the criteria for recognizing it as a normal specimen. He says the tree has "multiple trunks — two larger ones and one that has been broken a little bit lower down. Most of the other ones seem to have a single trunk habit."

He added that the tree either had been split at a young age, or was "three trees grown close together." He took sample cores from the tree, and said that preliminary analysis indicated that the tree was not a matriarchal tree. In other words, the samples indicated that the tree was about the same age as its neighbors.

Officials have been hesitant to express what could or should be done since this latest environmental issue arose last week.

Alan Goes, county forester, said Tuesday that discovery of the tree was "an interesting 11th-hour issue," but added, "I have not heard that anyone feels that it would be sufficient grounds to change the direction the permit has gone. I really don't think it's a planning

issue. Many landowners have resources on their property that are of public interest."

He added that "the meat and potatoes issues concerning the property have already been addressed and decided."

Supervisor Gary Patton called the appearance of the tree on the American Forestry Association records "a significant possible problem." He agreed with the view of Dwight Herr, chief deputy of the County Counsel's office, who said the use permit granted by the county could be revoked "if there are grounds for revoking it," but added "I don't know if it would be appropriate to re-open the hearings." He said the county would await the recommendation of the planning department.

Bob Leggett, senior planner for the project said Tuesday "so far there hasn't been a resolution on it. It could be re-opened," he admitted, but added, "there are simpler avenues of taking care of the thing. It would be worthwhile making an attempt to preserve this tree."

He said several options were being considered, including making the tree part of the cypress grove Beauregard is dedicating to the conservation group, or possibly making an island around the tree.

Beauregard said this morning that he would not consider proposals from the county regarding the tree, and that when he began clearing the land for his vineyard, the tree would go.

That concerns Bockman and the Sierra Club.

Bockman voices concern that Beauregard will remove the record-holding tree before the issue is decided.

Beauregard says he is planning to remove the tree when he begins clearing the land for the vineyard within the next 60 days. He also says he has been hassled by environmentalists since 1980.

The area had been identified in the Santa Cruz County General Plan and in the local Coastal Program Land Use Plan as a region where several endangered native plants were located. Among those identified were the Santa Cruz cypress and the Santa Cruz wallflower, also called the Ben Lomond wallflower, and the silver-leaved manzanita bush.

To get a permit, Beauregard has been required to set aside 14 acres of Santa Cruz cypress, which adjoin a 144-acre cypress grove which borders his property; and three acres of the wallflowers.

He is currently in the process of appealing one of the permits obtained from the Coastal Commission. He is being required to set aside 110 acres of the silver-leaved manzanita bushes.

He says he is going to fight for this acreage at a Coastal Commission hearing in San Francisco in late May or early June on the grounds that the manzanita is not an endangered species.

His plans then are to get on with planting his vineyard.



Focus of controversy is this tree — or is it three trees?